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ABSTRACT

Part of a series designed to provide practical ideas parents can use to help children become readers, this booklet focuses on how parents can encourage their children to read and write. The booklet describes how individuals learn to use language; discusses how to encourage the use of language; urges parents to build positive attitudes toward reading, writing, and speaking by praising the child's efforts and leaving correction for the classroom; suggests ways to demonstrate the purposes of reading, writing, and speaking; and encourages making books readily available to children, describing children's needs from birth to age 12 and including some book suggestions to meet these needs. A short list of recommended reading for parents and a list of resources available from the International Reading Association conclude the booklet. (SR)

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Creating Readers and Writers

Susan Mandel Glazer

2

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Creating Readers and Writers

If you enjoy reading, it is likely that books and magazines were part of your childhood. If you write to remember things or to share ideas, writing was probably used in similar ways in your home when you were a child.

We are surrounded by print. Street signs and billboards on highways tell us what to do, what to buy, and how to take care of things. Train schedules, menus, and catalogs inform us and give us choices. Advertisers and other groups send personalized notes that persuade, entertain, inform, and inspire all those who read.

It is awesome to think about all the reading and writing activities that we engage in each day. Knowing how to read and write is necessary in our world. We may read silently to get needed information, or we may read out loud to a friend just for fun. We write notes, lists, and letters to converse with someone a distance away. We do these things so naturally that they become an integral part of everyday living. If we encourage our children to read and write, these activities will become part of their lives, too.

How Do We Learn to Use Language?

Children are natural learners. By watching the people around them, they discover many of the skills they need to know in order to communicate. These needs often serve to create a desire for learning. I recall, for example, the time a friend came home and found this sign on her 4-year-old's bedroom door:

B Ki t
I m bzee.

Amy needed to be in her room alone. She had said it many times. Saying it, however, had not worked. So, out of necessity, Amy wrote the sign and hung it on her bedroom door. She assumed that Mom and Dad would read the sign, understand its message (Be quiet. I am busy.), and stay out of her room.

Amy's writing came naturally because her need motivated her to write. She knew how letters were used to make words. In a sense she was an inventor, creating written symbols for real actions. And she was able to read her symbols as well as write them.

When reading and writing are used daily by parents, children learn how to use books, pencils, crayons, and other materials to communicate. By watching adults read and write, children learn these things as easily as they learn to listen to stories or drink from a bottle. This kind of learning does not happen in the formal way that lessons in school do. Instead, children scribble with crayons or play with books, sneaking the books into bed and hugging them as affectionately as they would a teddy bear.

These activities help to create feelings of fondness and love for uses of language. These good feelings are created when you, as a parent, are (1) encouraging the use of language; (2) building positive attitudes toward reading, writing, and speaking; (3) demonstrating the purposes of reading, writing, and speaking; and (4) making appealing books readily available.

Encouraging the Use of Language

Children who are read to daily usually grow up loving books. Reading with parents, other caring adults, and older siblings can result in wonderful feelings. There are several ways to build these feelings while also helping children learn. Casually pointing to the print as we read helps children understand how the English language moves from left to right. Adult and child, together, move fingers and eyes through the print and pictures. Reading poems helps children feel the words, as if in a dance. Rereading books is fun for children because the words become good friends. Children love hearing their favorite stories over and over again. We know this is true when they say, "Read it again, please!"

To encourage reading and writing, you need to ask yourself: Have I created a comfortable environment for my child? Is the place where we read, write, and talk together a place we want to go back to? Do we have:

- comfortable chairs for sitting and cradling?
- a variety of books for all family members?
- places for storing books?
- places for writing messages?
- places to display writing and drawings?
- books that help to do things (cookbooks, sewing books, etc.)?
- different kinds of paper for writing, including stationery, scrap paper, drawing paper, note pads, colored and white paper?
- a variety of writing tools—crayons, pens, markers, chalk and chalkboard?
- paper and pencil near the telephone?
- books for traveling in cars, planes, and trains?

Building Positive Attitudes toward Reading, Writing, and Speaking

It is human nature to repeat, again and again, activities that bring us success. Success often means receiving praise from someone we like. We cook a meal a second time when we're told that it was delicious the first time. We continuously call that special friend who thinks we're wonderful. Success brings more success. If we're feeling good because we have received encouraging words about our reading and writing, we will read and write again.

Praise helps children want to read and write. Specific praise that describes the desired activity and gives the reason for encouraging it works best. When your child writes, you might say, "Oh, I like the way you're sharing your idea by writing it down. I'm glad. I can read it anytime I want to!" Praise should describe and define the behavior you want repeated: "I'm glad that you like that book. I can tell you like it because you read it over and over again," "I'm glad you left me a note to tell me where you were going," "I like the way you began your homework on your own," or "It's great how you found that book in the library all by

Reading to children is one of the best ways to help them build positive attitudes toward reading.

yourself." Such praise also gives the child a reason to repeat the behavior. Statements like these help children understand what we expect of them.

It is important to remember when praising a specific behavior that your comments must be free of evaluation. The purpose here is to encourage—correction is best saved for the classroom. Don't say, for example, "You pronounced that word wrong when you were reading your story." Say instead, "I'm glad you wanted to share your book by reading it out loud to me." Don't correct spelling in a message your child wrote to you. Do praise the child for writing the message. Instead of criticizing children for selecting the same book they chose last time they went to the library, praise them for selecting their favorite book.

Use intuition and common sense and ask yourself each time you praise, "Would that remark encourage me to continue?" If your response is "yes," you are probably praising your child appropriately.

Demonstrating the Purposes of Reading, Writing, and Speaking

Have you ever run into an old friend? Did you feel the need to rush home and tell someone about the encounter? Did you pull out your scrapbook to read an article about the friend that once appeared in the local newspaper? Did you feel you had to write a letter to another friend who had moved away to tell her about the meeting? All of us have had experiences that have made us talk, read, and write about things that have happened to us. We do this because we want to share our experiences. Writing, reading, and talking come naturally when we need to tell something to others.

Grandparents as well as parents should read to children.

Children communicate best when they feel the need to share ideas. Then communication can come as naturally as playing with friends. You can encourage the natural uses of reading, writing, and speaking by serving as a model for your child and by planning regular activities that involve reading, writing, and talking for you and your child.

Provide "Model" Behavior

Encourage reading by reading yourself. Read newspapers, books, advertisements, and labels on food cans. Be sure that your child sees you reading, and share your reading whenever you can. When your child comes to you for a hug, hold him or her close and point to an ad you like, a picture you find interesting, or the comics. Talk about what you're reading. Move your fingers across a line as you read it so that the child can connect what you're saying to the words on the page.

Write yourself notes to remember, such as lists of "things to do." Talk aloud as you write, in front of your child. This shows your child that talking and writing are related. Find a reason to share your writing. For example, say, "I've made a list of things to buy in the food market. Do you want anything? I'll write it on my list." Encourage the child to make his or her own list by providing many

examples. Your youngster learns from you as you carry out the activity. You can also leave notes for your child to read. Write telephone messages or directions for cleaning his or her room. Write special notes such as, "This note is just to say I love you."

Plan Regular Reading and Writing Activities

Set aside a regular time to share reading. Set an example by telling about one thing from a book, article, or magazine you've read. Make regular family trips to libraries and bookstores.

Establishing a special time to write also can be fun. Write your ideas in a diary. Talk about what you are writing sometimes. Say, for example, "I want to remember our family picnic so I will write myself a story. Then I can read it later and remember all about it." Encourage your child to choose his or her own topics to write about.

Read to your children from the day they are born and **never** stop. Read everything from storybooks to food wrappers. Read for as long as the children enjoy the experience.

Making Appealing Books Readily Available

When we select books we must be aware of children's interests, their social and moral values, what they think about, and their ideas about life.

When books are appealing and appropriate, children use them. Reading and listening to wonderful books lead to more reading and, eventually, to writing. Children first talk about their books. As they grow, they also begin to

write about the books they read. However, books that are inappropriate may never be read at all. That is why book selection is so important. The tragedy in missing good children's books is that as children age, they move on to new books and may never go back to the ones they missed earlier. Missing too many good books may stop children from learning to love books and from becoming lifetime readers.

The following section describes children's needs from birth to age 12. Included are some book suggestions to meet these needs. Use these as a guide to help you select additional books for your child.

Infants and toddlers learn by touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing the world. They need to be involved in order to learn. By the time children are 2 years old, they can use language to identify things.

Books for Infants and Toddlers

Should Have	*Suggestions*
Things to touch	*Pat the Bunny*. Dorothy Kunhardt. Golden Press-Western, 1942.
Language that repeats over and over again	*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Bill Martin Jr. Holt, 1983.
Pictures of objects and words to match	*My First Words: In My Room. My First Words: Me and My Clothes. My First Words: Time to Eat.* All three by Margaret Miller. Harper & Row, 1989.

Two- to 4-year-olds grow quickly. These children learn that although words stand for things, words are different from things. They understand what shapes, numbers, colors, and seasons are. They also learn what a story is. You can see they know because when they tell a story it usually

begins with "Once upon a time," just the way stories begin. It is important to remember that children from 2 through 4 see themselves as the most important persons in the world.

Books for 2- to 4-Year-Olds

Should Have	*Suggestions*
Objects to identify	*What's Inside: The Alphabet Book.* Satoshi Kitamura. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985. *Alphabatics.* Suse Macdonald. Bradbury Press, 1986.
Language that builds or accumulates	*This Is the House That Jack Built.* Illustrated by Pam Adams. Child's Play, 1977.
Language that repeats and has rhythm, like a song	*Millions of Cats.* Wanda Gag. Putnam, 1988. *The Bus Stop.* Nancy Hellen. Orchard, 1988.
Simple stories	*Are You My Mother?* P.D. Eastman. Random House, 1960.
Ideas that center around the child	Mommy, *Daddy*, Me. Lyn Hoopes. Harper & Row, 1988.

Five- to 6-year-olds seem very grown-up. They seem to know who they are and what they believe in. They can talk about things that frighten them. They can watch things happen and describe them carefully. By this age, they have well-developed imaginations, and they begin to develop a real sense of competitiveness. Their sense of morality, which encourages this competitive drive, says, "If you do it to me, I'll do it back."

Books for 5- to 6-Year-Olds

Should Have	*Suggestions*
Stories that reassure the child that everything is okay	*Reuben Runs Away*. Richard Galbraith. Orchard, 1989.
Fantasies that seem real when reading them	*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Beatrix Potter. Various editions available.
Clear, predictable plots	*First Snow*. Emily McCully. Harper & Row, 1988.
Plots that show "right wins out" in the end	*I'll Fix Anthony*. Judith Viorst. Macmillan, 1988.

Seven- to 8-year-olds should begin to read on their own. They like to read about things that are real. They enjoy thinking about ideas in several ways. They can even think about ideas from someone else's point of view. Children at this age like to read independently.

Books for 7- to 8-Year-Olds

Should Have	*Suggestions*
Words and ideas your child can read	*Last One in Is a Rotten Egg*. Leonard Kessler. Harper & Row, 1969.
Realistic events and ideas	*Encyclopedia Brown's Second Record Book of Weird and Wonderful Facts*.Donald Sobol. Delacorte, 1981.
Characters with whom your child can identify	*Ramona the Brave*. Beverly Cleary. Dell, 1984.
Ideas that have several meanings	*The Amazing, the Incredible Super Dog*.Crosby Bonsall. Harper & Row, 1986.
Ideas and information that can be organized in several ways	*Charlotte's Web*. E.B. White. Harper & Row, 1952.

Nine to 12 is a funny stage. Sometimes a youth of this age will want to be a grown-up but, at other times, a child. You'll notice a peculiar sense of humor. Boys and girls at this age see humor in language when it is used in interesting ways, and they often create secret code languages. Adventure and suspense intrigue them. These youngsters have a great concern for things that happen to themselves. However, even though "self" is a focus, team activities are important, too.

Books for 9- to 12-Year-Olds

Should Have	*Suggestions*
Interesting language	*The King Who Rained.* Fred Gwynne. Simon & Schuster, 1988.
Silly, nonsensical ideas	*How to Eat Fried Worms.* Thomas Rockwell. Dell, 1988.
Topics of concern to this age group	*I, Trissy.* Norma Mazer. Dell, 1986. *Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade.* Barthe DeClements. Penguin, 1981. *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret.* Judy Blume. Dell, 1972.
Plots that include team games or activities	*Soccer Halfback.* Matt Christopher. Little, Brown, 1985.

You know your child better than anyone else does. You know what he or she likes and dislikes. It is up to you to provide an environment that will make your child want to read and write. Read yourself, and be a model for your child. Write notes to share messages or ideas. Encourage conversations by listening with interest to your child's concerns, desires, hopes, and dreams. Make reading and writing part of your daily life, and your child will, too.

Recommended Reading for Parents

A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, fifth edition. Nancy Larrick. Bantam Books, 1982.

Bibliography of Books for Children. Sylvia Sunderlin. Association for Childhood Education International, 1989.

Eyeopeners! How to Choose and Use Children's Books about Real People, Places, and Things. Beverly Kobrin. Viking, 1988.

The Difficult Child. Stanley Turecki and Leslie Tonner. Bantam, 1989.

Growing Up Happy. Bob Keeshan. Doubleday, 1989.

What Do You Really Want for Your Children? Wayne W. Dyer. Avon, 1986.

Your Baby and Child from Birth to Five. Penelope Leach. Knopf, 1978.

Resources from IRA for Parents

Books

Children, Parents, and Reading. Mary M. Boehnlein and Beth H. Hagar. No. 341. US$5.75; IRA members, US$4.25.

Magazines for Children. Donald R. Stoll, Ed. Copublished by EDPRESS and IRA. No. 153. US$5.25; IRA members, US$3.50.

The New Read-Aloud Handbook. Jim Trelease. Published by Penguin Books and codistributed by IRA. No. 637. US$9.95; IRA members, US$9.25.

Young Children and Picture Books: Literature from Infancy to Six. Mary Renck Jalongo. Published by NAEYC and codistributed by IRA. No. 634. US$10.00; IRA members, US$9.00.

To order, send your check to International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA. Please specify both title and publication number when ordering.

Parent Booklets

Beginning Literacy and Your Child. Steven B. Silvern and Linda R. Silvern. No. 164.

Creating Readers and Writers. Susan Mandel Glazer. No. 165.

Helping Your Child Become a Reader. Nancy L. Roser. No. 161.

How Can I Prepare My Young Child for Reading? Paula C. Grinnell. No. 163.

You Can Encourage Your High School Student to Read. Jamie Myers. No. 162.

You Can Help Your Young Child with Writing. Marcia Baghban. No. 160.

Single copies of these parent booklets are available at a cost of US$1.75 each, prepaid only. Send your check to Parent Booklets at the address listed earlier. Please specify both title and publication number when ordering.

Parent Brochures

IRA has available 10 brochures covering a variety of topics pertaining to ways in which parents can help children of all ages become readers. To receive single copies of all 10 brochures, send a self-addressed envelope stamped with first class postage for *three* ounces to Parent Brochures at the address listed earlier. The brochures are available in bulk quantities also, and ordering information appears in each brochure. (Requests from outside the USA should include a self-addressed envelope, but postage is not required.)

Children's Choices

Children's Choices is a yearly list of books that children identify as their favorites. To receive a single copy, send a self-addressed envelope stamped with first class postage for *four* ounces to Children's Choices at the address listed earlier.

This booklet is part of a series designed to provide practical ideas parents can use to help their children become readers. Many of the booklets are being copublished by IRA and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.

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The International Reading Association is a 93,000 member nonprofit education organization devoted to the improvement of reading instruction and the promotion of the lifetime reading habit.

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